

Third Sunday of Easter

April 18, 2021

"Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have."

We do well to take what Jesus did for the disciples not only to heart, but quite literally. Jesus does show up in our midst, but do we understand that He really is here. Yes, there are some, I suppose a few, who, from time to time, who hear Jesus speak literally. But in reality, the kindness, caring, love that pours out through us, the community, is, I believe, a part of why He does not just always show up physically. He wants us to be like Him. He is here and chooses to live through the faithful showing of His presence in us.

A little girl woke up after a bad dream. Her mother came in, sat on the bed to comfort her daughter. She said, "You know that Jesus is always here with you." "Yes mom, I know," the girl said, "but sometimes I need someone with skin on."

It is one of the greatest privileges to be the skin of Jesus for another. Just a kind act, the compassionate reaching out to another, is a gift the Holy Spirit gives to those who learn to obey. I'm not talking about the ten commandments obedience here, but about those Holy Spirit moments where our Lord gives us the opportunity to literally let the light of Christ shine through us. We get to be the presence of Jesus for another.

Jesus stood in their midst and let them touch Him. He knew they needed what He gave them. He knows what we need. Everything in your life has a purpose. God has promised to bring it all together and it will be good. I remind you what Jesus told us. He said that we are not to worry. I know we do, but let that be the place of struggle. Do not ever say to the Lord, "But, you do not understand." The Lord understands suffering more than any of us. He sees all the suffering in the world, not just now, but across the whole of time. Who could stand one nanosecond of that except for Him?

The disciples continued to be perplexed. Startled that Jesus was there, yet the ripening of joy came because He was. Sometimes, like Mary, we immediately cling to Jesus. Remember He told her to stop that. Do not cling to your idea of Jesus, let the Light of Eternity hold You and form you. There is a distinct difference.

Jesus took the broiled fish and ate it in their presence. Does a ghost eat? Jesus is flesh and blood, fully God, and fully Spirit. The mystery of this is more than I can begin to comprehend, but do take it in. If we have been created in His image, then we too shall be like what He showed Himself to be. Not God, but, as John tells us, children of God.

There is another important literal thing that has happened. You and I say that we sin, and we do. But then, Jesus died for our sins so that we are freed from the recompense from sin. This does not mean that we go ahead and sin away thinking it does not matter. No, we cling to Jesus who creates in us new and clean hearts. This is why John told us to not be deceived, but to do righteousness. It is in the doing of righteousness that our belief is demonstrated. What we do is a reflection of what we believe. That is why James said that we should show our faith through all that we do. In this sense, sin is no longer a part of the equation. Yes, we struggle with the old Adam. We do break God's law. The answer to this is to repent, be forgiven and move on in the righteous life to which we have all been called. This is what John meant when he said, "He was revealed to take away our sins." It is a matter of lawlessness versus lawfulness. I trust that you do not go onto the road with the intent of driving lawlessly. Sometimes you look down and you see that you are breaking the speed limit. Do you say, "Who cares," or slow down and correct your driving? Saying, "Everybody does it," is no excuse.

As you live the life our Lord has given you, do not kill Him, His presence, or His purpose in your life. Sometimes we may be unaware that we would rather not have Jesus present. But why would that be? If we are called to live lives of righteousness, what could we possibly be doing where we would not want our Lord present. I'll give you a head's up: He is going to be present always, because that is what He tells us He will do. He has promised that He will be with us always. Ignoring His presence is never a good idea.

While in the upper room with the disciples, Jesus opened their mind to understand the Scriptures. He does the same for us. This is the real reason we should spend time in the Bible. Every time you have had an "aha" moment, the Lord is opening your eyes to the truth He has revealed in Scripture. He said of Scriptures, "You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me." Our life is in Christ, not in the words about Him. This is most certainly true.

When James and John approached Jesus, asking for positions of privilege, Jesus asked if they would take the cup of Jesus. They did. The cup of suffering is allotted to us in this age. Think of the Beatitudes. We are blessed through the struggle that is present in this age. Every struggle has its purpose. When we understand that our Lord is making us new, we begin to see, if we seek to be faithful to our call to live out the righteousness of Christ in our daily life, that the Lord is shaping us into a new person. No, this is not just about getting older. I have known way too many elderly who were just as immature as many teenagers are. I have known mature faithful teenagers who understood more about a life of faith than many older adults. This has nothing to do with chronological age and everything to do with maturing in the Christ-life we are given by grace. Jesus has come to take all of our weakness, our sin, the selfishness, and behaviors and mold them into the image of a child of God.

To repent is to change direction. You cannot have it your way and think the way of the Lord will be accomplished in your life. We have before us two roads. Either you do it your way, or else You give yourself to the Lord of life. Throughout each day, we often face this fork in the road. If you have taken the wrong road, sometimes the shortest way round is to go back to the fork and take the right road. Being repentant is hard work. Jesus never said this would be easy. It wasn't easy for Him. Some rightly say that it was easier for Jesus because He is God. But then, the case is really understated. What has been done for us was only possible because He was and is God.

Our Savior, the Anointed One, Messiah had to suffer, die, and rise again. Our faith is based upon this simple pattern. We suffer because of sin in the world. Daily, we need to die to sin, death, and the devil. As we go out into the world, the last thing they need to hear is how good we think we are. Instead, focus upon how good Jesus is. I would rather hear the story of one who has been led by Jesus to overcome the burdens in their life, than to hear about how wonderful something thinks they are. Jesus will work it all together for good.

Let your hope be rekindled. Trust in the One who is the author and finisher of your faith. He is always present and will never leave, nor forsake you. He who knows all the suffering of this age has carried the full burden upon Himself. Keep your hearts and minds on Christ knowing that He will bring you to completion.

As we hear from John, "Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is." Know that He will take away your sins and though they be as scarlet, He will make you as pure as the driven snow. We may not know what we will be in eternity, but for now, put on the image of Christ and walk the path of becoming like Him. Amen.